

Something to Rely On by TangiblyYours

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Warnings: Richie Tozier's fantastically vulgar mouth and some mild insinuations, but that's it.

Disclaimer: Do not own this franchise, am not Stephen King.

Note: I recommend checking out my story 'Somewhere to Begin' before reading; I guess it's not required but everything will make a lot more sense. It Chapter two explained from my perspective to get us here. This is a fix-it.

Chapter One: oh, simple thing, where have you gone?

Richie Tozier had nightmares.

All-consuming nightmares; the kind that would devour you from the inside out, creeping in during a moment of peace, right when you least expected it. Nightmares that would saturate every bone and muscle fiber in your body. Nightmares that would make you run cold with fear, locked in place and unable to move.

The kind of nightmares that would have even the most composed and levelheaded man jolting awake in fear. And Richie certainly had neither one of those qualities about himself.

Without fail, every single night, Richie Tozier had those nightmares.

Despite the fact that they had just defeated Pennywise only two nights prior, Richie's experience with the nightmares was nothing new to him. However, they had altered drastically since that night's events. Now when he woke up, he was breathing heavily with Eddie's name on the tip of his tongue. Grasping at a mere ghost of the nightmare as it replayed the scene he had witnessed in the deadlights.

Before the call from Mike Hanlon about a week ago, Richie still had the nightmares. However, when he would wake up he would remember virtually nothing of what had happened within the dream. Just a cold fear so deep it weighed heavily inside his stomach and made him feel ill.

Now, though, he awoke remembering every deep, dark aspect to the horrible dreams. He could almost taste the thick iron tang of blood on his lips, even though that specific moment was long in his past. He could smell the rot from the sewer, feel the moisture clinging to his clothes. It was all too real, and when he woke up, startled and alone in his bed, it took a long time for the fear to dissipate, clinging to him as the water and filth had clung to him in the dream.

As he awoke from this particular nightmare, two nights after finally defeating Pennywise on Neibolt street, Richie yet again had Eddie's name on his tongue, fear coiling deep in his chest.

He blinked several times to clear the sleep from his eyes, and glanced carefully around his quiet room at the Townhouse in Derry, Maine. Taking a deep breath, he laid back in bed once more.

His return flight home hadn't even been booked yet and even Richie didn't know why at this point. The reason for his return was no more, and somehow the fear and nightmares were significantly worse in this little hell-hole town, but still, Richie hadn't made any real attempt to get out.

He told himself he didn't know what was holding him back, but oh yes, he did.

Eddie.

The name was still balanced carefully on the tip of his tongue.

And not just Eddie, either, but the rest of his friends, too. They were all still in Derry, just casually dancing around each other and the fact that their darkest fears had come to a final head two days ago.

Not a single one of them had so much as mentioned leaving yet.

And not a single one of them knew what they were waiting for.

Likely, it had to do with the fact that they had all just gotten each other back after all these years of forgotten memories. They didn't want to leave again so quickly, equally afraid that the memories of each other would be lost once more.

So, instead, they stayed. And for now, Richie thought, that was enough.

The next morning, Richie met everyone in the lobby of the townhouse. It was quiet as usual, but there was something mildly different hanging in the air, something lighter, happier even.

"Why are we all still so miserable?" Ben had started, looking around the room. "We did it, guys! It's finally fucking gone!"

The unspoken words hung in the air between them. We lost one of our own in the process. *Stanley*.

Ben faltered, sitting in one of the arm chairs and sighing deeply.

"I have an idea," Bill mumbled from where he was perched on one of the bar stools. "Let's get out of here. B-but, like... together." He stood then, addressing everyone in the room, his eyes sweeping from Richie to Ben to Bev to Eddie and settling carefully on Mike. "That's what we're all worried ab-b-bout, right? Leaving and forgetting each other again? So, let's leave this shithole town together and take a trip, somewhere n-nice, and really catch up before we go home." Bill became more animated as he spoke, gesturing his excitement and pacing carefully back and forth. "We'll make it a yearly thing. Just in case the loss of memory had nothing to do with Pennywise. W-w-we'll muh-make sure we d-don't forget again."

Richie watched him before glancing around the room. Looking into the faces of his friends, his family that, up until a week ago, he had forgotten virtually every aspect of. He didn't want to lose this again, he didn't want to lose them.

And his subconscious added to that thought as his gaze settled on Eddie. *I don't want to lose him.*

"Bill, count me down, buddy!" he enthused, standing from his spot in the armchair. "You losers coming with us?"

Ben glanced up to Bev. She had perched herself on the arm of Ben's chair, and she was smiling, bright and warm. "I think that sounds like a great idea," she said and her gaze cut down to Ben. He smiled and nodded.

"Yeah, I'm in," he spoke to the rest of them.

Bill turned his glance to Mike.

"Y'know, I've been needing to get out of this town for a long time. I think this is it." Mike's smile was open and carefree, probably for the first time in a very long while.

Everyone's gaze turned to Eddie in that moment. Richie couldn't help himself as he stared the other man up and down. He had a gauze bandage carefully tapped to his wounded cheek, and a dark black and blue eye. Richie suspected the black eye had come from when they tumbled backwards off from the rocky incline under Neibolt.

A shudder ran down his spine as he thought of that moment, as he thought about the near miss that would have resulted in the loss of not just one, but *two* of the most important people in his life. He shook his head to clear the thought.

After they had escaped the house and watched it tumble to the ground, Richie had been a mess. There was no other words for it, his breathing had been erratic, and a giant hole had taken over his stomach. He felt empty with fear, unable to process and adjust.

Eddie had almost died, it had been so fucking close. Just a hair to the right and a moment too late, and it would have been all over for him.

'For them,' Richie's thoughts filled in gently.

It took every single one of his friends to calm him down, all of them eventually reaching out to him, supporting him. And it took a while, but soon, Richie's breathing evened pace and he was able to calm his nerves.

And while he would never admit it to himself, or anyone else for that matter, he had followed Eddie around all day like a lost damn puppy. Just needing the constant reminder that he was there, he was okay, he was alive.

Before Mike Hanlon's call, it had been a very, very long time since Richie had thought of-remembered-his friends from Derry. However, after having received the phone call, memories had filtered into his mind one by one, filling him with emotions he hadn't even been aware existed. And these memories weren't just basic facts that his mind had forgotten about, no.

Suddenly, he was able to recall every feeling, every fear, every moment of joy and gut-wrenching laughter, every moment of bone-crushing sadness. In the moments after that phone call, Richie was quite literally assaulted with these feelings. This all-consuming warmth, comfort, love, terror, agony, sadness, all at once. All things he felt from that summer of '89, and even though it had been over 27 years ago, it *felt* as though it had been only a moment's time since it had happened.

The sensation was so potent that it felt as though he had been punched in the gut.

And it didn't stop, these feelings and emotions and memories. They flooded his mind, making it their home, so many of them it felt as though his simple memories from even that morning were long in his past, now consumed by these thoughts of his childhood.

He was filled with this awareness, this warmth that he hadn't even known he was missing. He felt whole suddenly.

He remembered Bill's stutter, his leadership role among them. He remembered the dark pain that has existed in Bill's eyes the summer

after Georgie's death. It was almost as though the other boy had been perpetually plagued by the absence of his brother and a guilt he had inexplicably harbored.

He remembered Ben's compassion and warmth. The first time they met when he had realized just how lonely Ben was, and how he suspected that Ben was one of the missing pieces to their little puzzle.

He remembered Beverly. The girl who would sneak cigarettes with him and match every crude joke he tossed her way. When they first met, she had come across as subdued and quiet. However, Richie had quickly learned that Beverly had a fire in her soul that would not, *could not*, be extinguished.

He remembered Mike. The structure and support he had provided. He had been the last one to join their little group, and as soon as he was there, it was as though they were *whole*.

He remembered Stanley. Quite, humble, careful Stanley. Always watching out for them and keeping close tabs on the people he loved so thoroughly. He remembered the time when Richie had tossed an exceptionally vulgar comment Stanley's way, and Stanley glanced at him, barely even reacting, and slapped Richie upside the head in a way that was almost fond. He tried so hard to hide his grin, but Richie had caught it.

And, finally, he remembered Eddie.

He remembered Eddie's neuroticism. The way he was shove at Richie every time Richie threatened to lick the side of his face *just because* he knew how much it grossed Eddie out.

He remembered Eddie's spitfire personality, his temper, his short fuse that Richie just loved to light so he could watch the slow detonation.

He remembered Eddie's warmth and compassion. How if Richie ever did falter, breaking his character, and needed a shoulder to lean on or someone to listen, Eddie was always fucking there. Even if it was three in the morning on a school night. If Richie called, Eddie was *there*.

He remembered the games they would play, how they would shove at each other, taunt each other, curse back and forth as though they were sailors. Eddie never let Richie get away with anything; he was always able to bounce back with an equally biting comment. And Richie fucking *loved* it.

They would fight with each other incessantly.

And Richie remembered the way the two of them had almost always used that as an excuse to be touching.

He remembered poking Eddie's side until it annoyed him so much that he would inevitably tackle Richie to the ground. They would wrestle with each other, and most of the time, it would result in Richie tickling Eddie until the other could no longer breathe. He remembered watching movies with the losers every Friday night at Bill's house, and how Eddie *always* sat next to him. About three fourths of the way through the movie, Eddie would always fall asleep and bury himself into Richie's side, Richie's arm draped over the Eddie's shoulders and Eddie's face tucked carefully into Richie's chest.

He remembered how he watched Eddie, always. How his gaze would instinctively follow Eddie, and how Richie almost seemed to move unconsciously with and towards him at all times.

He remembered the feelings of warmth he had when he was with Eddie, a feeling of wholeness, of *home*. He remembered it so fervently that his stomach ached with the realization he couldn't reach out and touch Eddie in that exact moment. *How* had he possibly forgotten this?

At that time, still at his home in L.A., Richie wondered just how long he had loved Eddie and had not known it.

Richie was pulled from his thoughts in that moment, as Eddie's gaze settled on him. It grounded him to where he stood, and Richie felt a hot surge of electricity course down his spine. Not for the first time in even the last twenty minutes, Richie wanted, almost *needed*, to reach out and touch him.

"Of course," Eddie spoke, his gaze still focused solely on Richie. "I'll

follow you guys anywhere."

"Listen." Eddie's hushed voice could just barely be heard from where Richie stood outside of Eddie's guest room at the townhouse. Their rooms had been right next to one another, and he figured he would wait for him before heading down to check out and meet with the others. The door to Eddie's room was cracked open. Richie had entertained the idea of going in, but thought better of it once he realized he was on the phone. "I know I didn't say much when I was leaving-"

Pause.

"-yes, Myra, I *know*." Eddie sounded exasperated, like he was reaching a tipping point.

A longer pause this time.

"*Listen*," Eddie said again, a little more forceful. Richie shifted awkwardly where he stood in the hall. "I really don't know what to tell you, Myra?" He said this as a question, but the tone of his voice left zero room for negotiating. "This is happening whether you want it to or not. Honestly, I don't know when I'll be home," Eddie paused, as though thinking for a moment. "And, honestly, Myra, we really need to sit down and talk when I get home. A few things have changed since I've been home."

Silence now; Richie could only wonder what the other half of this conversation sounded like.

"Yeah, I know I sound different!" Eddie stated dully. "I am different, and it's really not a conversation for over the phone, alright? There's a lot going on here that you don't know about. Honestly, that I didn't even know about until a few days ago."

Richie peeked his head around the corner of the doorway to glance inside the guest room. Eddie was pacing back and forth, and had the phone pulled away from his head by a few inches as though the person on the other end was shouting. He raised his other hand and ran it through his hair. Richie followed the movement with his eyes.

All of a sudden, Eddie halted his movement. He turned from where he was standing to face the door of the guest room, as though he could sense that someone was watching him. As soon as he realized Richie was there, he offered a sheepish smile before returning to his pacing.

"Yeah, I don't know what to tell you," Eddie stated again into the phone. "Listen, I've got to go. I've got people waiting for me. Like I said, we'll talk when I get home."

And with that, Eddie clicked the end button on the phone. Not a single '*good-bye*' or '*love you, Myra*', and not even the slightest hint of affection in his words. Somehow, that made Richie smile.

Within a moment, Eddie was in the doorway to the guest room, his several packed bags being carted behind him. "Sorry about that," Eddie started, small smile still in place as he glanced up at Richie. "Figured I should probably give at least a little bit of a heads up I might not be home for a while."

Richie nodded, throwing one arm around Eddie's shoulders and taking one of his bags from him. After all, Richie only had a small duffel. Maybe he really should have packed a bit more, but he hadn't planned on going on an impulsive, God-only-knows-how-long road trip with his buddies from grade school.

"What's the matter, Eds?" Richie taunted. He turned to glance at Eddie once more, and in his next few words, spoke in the old, uppity British accent from his childhood. The voice had been long from his past and forgotten much like everything else. "Trouble in paradise, Eds, ay, wot-wot?"

Surprisingly, Eddie didn't react much to Richie's provocation. Rather, he seemed to lean into Richie's side and scowl at the ground. "Something like that," he muttered. "Y'know, I don't think I've been happy in that relationship for a long time...or life in general, really...but I didn't realize just *how* unhappy I was until I started to remember and until I got here."

Richie knew what Eddie was talking about. It was almost as though Richie didn't even really, truly know himself until he got that call

from Mike and started to remember the pieces of himself that he had been missing. It was catastrophic, knowing he had gone through a large portion of his life missing such intrinsic pieces of who he was.

"Like," Eddie started again as they continued to move to the lobby. "She's just like my mother. Which, apparently, I had completely forgotten about, as well. When I left Derry, I guess a majority of my mother's neuroses got left behind alongside my memories," he paused again, sounding irritated. "I basically married my fucking mother and I had no idea. I can't fucking go back to that."

At that, Richie threw his head back in laughter. "Well, look at that!" Richie chortled. "We're almost the same, Eds! I married your mother, too! But, like...your real one."

Eddie threw his elbow deep into Richie's side, and Richie recoiled but used the arm that was slung over Eddie's shoulder to pull his head down and ruffle his hair. He laughed carelessly as Eddie continued to jab into his side, trying to get him to stop fucking with his hair.

As they walked, they borderline wrestled with each other down the entire hallway. As soon as Eddie was able to lift his head from Richie's grasp, he reached out and shoved him into the wall. Richie bounced back without even a moment of hesitation and knocked into Eddie, trying desperately to catch the other in a headlock again.

It was like this that they entered the lobby to the townhouse, all of their friends waiting and watching from the bar.

"F-finally," Bill exclaimed, jumping from his spot on one of the bar stools. "Let's get this sh-show on the road!"

The few of them that had rented vehicles from the airport returned them, and the others (Bill and Ben who had taken respective cabs from their flight, and Mike who obviously hadn't needed transportation at all) road along with them.

Once they all arrived at the rental company and returned their vehicles, they decided that purchasing a different rental to fit them all would be their most productive course of action. After discussing

with the attendant for a while, they settled on a Chevrolet Tahoe with unlimited miles to travel anywhere within the United States. They even discussed other locations of the rental company that they could return the vehicle to if they decided not to come back this way at all.

Within a matter of hours, the six of them were on the highway with no real destination in mind whatsoever.

They had decided they would all take turns driving, and at night, they would bunk up in hotels.

"So where should we head first?" Bill started. All of them, including Bill himself, seemed to notice how the farther away from Derry he got, the more his stutter seemed to improve. It was still there, but marginally less noticeable during a casual conversation.

Bill was the first to drive and Mike was in the passenger seat; in the center was Ben and Beverly, and in the very back was Eddie and Richie. Eddie had moaned when they had decided how the seating for the drive would go, but it was halfhearted, and Richie could tell it was just for show.

"Eddie," Beverly had said at the time. "Let's be real here, you're the only one of us that can put up with being next to him for that long."

"Ey, babe!" Richie yelled. "I'll be right behind you, I can still reach around to annoy you, too!"

Mike had chuckled. "Richie, somehow, I think you'll still be able to annoy all of us."

They had also decided unanimously and regardless of Eddie's opposition that they would room together when stopping for the night. It would be Ben and Beverly (obviously-everyone could see the direction their relationship was going in just the past two days alone), Bill and Mike, and Richie and Eddie. "It's perfect!" Ben had exclaimed, holding onto Bev's hand and smiling foolishly at her.

Richie had slung his arm around Eddie's shoulder for approximately the fourth time in the last two hours and made *smooching* noises in

his direction. "Just so *perfect*, Eddie Spaghetti!" Eddie had simply scowled and pushed Richie away also for approximately the fourth time in the last two hours.

Everyone around them had laughed, Eddie had tried to hide his smile, and Richie absolutely could not control his beaming smile.

The first real place they stopped (not just for gas or snacks or to use the restroom) was Claremont, New Hampshire.

They had been driving for almost five hours, it was slowly approaching 6 in the afternoon, and all of them were combating stomach pangs of hunger with leftover chips and candy from their previous pit stops.

"Do you guys want to stop here for the night? Or just stop for a bite to eat and get back on the road?" Bill had questioned as they got out of the vehicle.

They had pulled up to this little diner with a real homey look to it. There weren't too many vehicles in the parking lot and there was a roadside message board in front stating that they had the best custard in all of New Hampshire. Richie had all but squawked his excitement and demanded that Bill pull over.

Eddie crawled from the back of the Tahoe and stretched carefully, trying to remove the kinks from his back. "Well, I found a pretty reasonably priced hotel in Albany if you guys wanna drive a couple more hours west. Have we decided our destination yet, or are we just driving until we find it?"

Richie was next to crawl from the car, and tried not to stare at the spot where Eddie's shirt rode up just a little as he stretched, exposing a layer of milky, smooth flesh on his stomach. Richie's stomach ached a little, and he thought maybe this time had nothing to do with hunger. *At least not the conventional type.*

"Albany sounds good to me," Mike started. "We'll have made two states away from that hell-hole. The farther, the better, if you ask me."

Everyone was standing outside of the Tahoe, casually discussing their trip, and Richie thought he was about to die. "Can we take this conversation inside? I think my stomach is about to open itself up and consume Eddie here if I don't eat something in the next ten minutes."

Eddie rolled his eyes. "You're so fucking dramatic," he said as he turned and started walking toward the diner entrance. Richie all but bounced and followed him in.

About three and a half hours later, they were pulling into the hotel in Albany.

Eddie had been able to reserve three rooms online while they were eating at the little diner in Claremont. Richie had proclaimed that *'yes! they do have the best custard in all of New Hampshire!'* even though he had absolutely nothing to compare it to.

The hotel they were staying at was affordable and in a fairly large part of the city. They figured they could get up and check out in time for a decent breakfast and perhaps shop around downtown a little before getting back on the road.

They checked into their respective room by 10 p.m. and virtually all of them were in a deep slumber by 10:30 p.m., completely wiped from their day on the road. And, admittedly, having to listen to Richie chat through the whole fucking car ride.

Eddie, however, laid awake in his bed, staring at the ceiling and wondering mindlessly if Richie was asleep in the bed next to his.

He hadn't even had time to turn and look before he heard a quiet *'Eddie?'* come from the other side of the room.

"Yeah?" Eddie whispered, quietly even though it was not needed. They were the only two in the room, and they were both obviously still awake.

"Do you have nightmares?"

At this, Eddie turned in his bed to face Richie and rested his head on

his elbow for support. "Yeah, of course, I do. I figured we all did."

"Did you have nightmares before Mike called?" Richie sounded...oddly small. Eddie couldn't quite wrap his head around it.

He thought for a minute. "Yeah. I did. I would just wake up and not be able to remember them." It took another moment of deep thought before he opened his mouth again. "I think I used to dream about you guys a lot. About you guys getting hurt, or taken... I would wake up with this fear, this ache in my chest and it was like something was missing and I could never figure out what it was. It was like I was scared to lose something that I didn't know existed..." he paused. "Scared to lose something that I already lost."

Even though it was dark in the room, Eddie could see the movement of Richie's head as he nodded, and the way his Adam's apple bobbed up and down as he swallowed.

"Me, too." Richie had turned to face him as well, only about three feet of distance separating their two beds. If Eddie had reached out far enough, he thought he could have maybe touched Richie's arm. "I have them every night, have for as long as I can remember. That's why I never wanted to get into a serious relationship. Never wanted to try and explain nightmares I didn't even know why I had."

"I don't sleep in the same room as Myra," Eddie stated. "Haven't for a long fucking time."

Richie was quiet once more, thoughtful. "If you're not happy, Eds, why do you stay?"

"I'm not planning on it," Eddie started, and remembered that Richie had been outside of the door for at least a portion of the conversation he had with his wife earlier in the day. "That's why I told her we need to talk when I get home. Honestly, I can't keep living the way I have been. Not after remembering all of this. Not knowing what I know now."

Much like Richie, when Eddie started to recall all of his memories from Derry, all of the emotions came with, full-force.

Suddenly, he remembered this life he hadn't even known existed and it had changed him inexplicably and irrevocably. Knowing what he now knew, knowing the feelings that he harbored deep in his chest, there was no way he could ever go back to being with Myra.

When Eddie started to remember his past, he remembered vivid aspects of who he was that he had actually *tried* to forget when he was growing up.

Eddie was not attracted to women. Not in any way, shape, or form.

Eddie was pulled from his thoughts as he heard Richie take a deep, shuddering breath in the bed across from him. "My nightmares have been worse in the past couple days. I don't think it's just 'cause I can remember them now," Richie paused, careful, cautious. "I think it's because of what happened."

And Richie doesn't have to elaborate for Eddie to know exactly what he was referring to. Eddie could still feel the ghost of the talon scrap across his back as Richie had pulled him down and away from the threat. He could still feel himself being all but tossed backwards and down the rocky slope of the cavern beneath Neibolt.

The way the Richie had grasped onto him in that moment, as they had stopped moving, was desperate and terrified. As though the other man was aware of their fate if he didn't keep pulling them in the opposite direction. And maybe he was, Eddie thought, they certainly hadn't talked about it. Especially after the thorough melt down that Richie had in the cavern and again on the street outside of the house. No one had dared mention it, too afraid to dredge up any residual fear within him. Richie had been utterly *wrecked*. And it had taken a long time to talk him down from his fear.

Eddie simply hummed in response to Richie's statement, unsure of what to say. Afraid to push the conversation, afraid to address it in general, honestly.

Richie clenched his eyes shut. He seemed delicate in that moment, Eddie thought, and Richie was not *delicate*. Anything but. However, when they had pulled him from Neibolt, and in those moments right before and right after, Richie had been even more than delicate. He

had been already broken, at that point.

"I had seen it all," Richie whispered suddenly, and Eddie had to lean impossibly closer to the edge of the bed to even be able to hear. "I had seen it happen."

No one had asked Richie after that afternoon. No one had asked him what he had meant when he had been shouting on the street of Neibolt. No one had tried to understand what the other had gone through.

So, Eddie, in that moment, was fairly unaware of what Richie was even talking about. He knew a little, but not enough to understand the full picture.

"What did you see, Richie?" Eddie asked carefully.

Richie opened his eyes then, and his bright blue irises cut into the darkness to focus on Eddie. He could see the nerves that shone within them. "I saw him kill you, Eds."

And that much, Eddie did know. He remembered the words that Richie had shouted at Bill on the street corner: *'he killed him, Bill! I saw it, he killed him!'* However, that was *all* Eddie knew, and it seemed like Richie, in this moment, wanted to explain more.

"I know," Eddie whispered, trying his hardest to sound pacifying.

"I know I told you guys that I saw it, but...I don't think you understand. I saw it, and it was *real*. He killed you, and if I hadn't of seen it, it would have *happened*." Richie sounded just slightly out of breath. "Remember how when Bev was caught in the deadlights when we were thirteen? And how just a few days ago she said that during that she had seen every single one of us die? That's what I saw, Eddie, I saw how you were about to die."

Eddie watched Richie cautiously, afraid to move or talk. He could see the fear in Richie's eyes, hear it in every word he spoke.

"It felt so fucking real, Eds. Like, I don't even know how to explain in. And I couldn't move or do anything. That talon went right through your chest, and I could *feel* warm blood on my face, *fuck!* I could *taste*

it. And it was honestly one of the worst things I've ever experienced in my entire life..." he paused, thoughtful. "And, I mean, I've had sex with your mom, so?"

At that, there was a noticeable shift in the room. A tension had been building between them since the moment they had started talking, but now it seemed to shatter. And, suddenly, Eddie was laughing.

And Richie was, too. The fear in his eyes was now replaced by this happiness, as though the conversation hadn't happened at all; or maybe that it had happened but he had realized that it was in their past now and the threat was no longer there.

As his laughter subsided, Eddie's eyes caught Richie's once more. And there was this warmth there, this adoration, and Eddie felt his heart tug tight in his chest. His chuckles tapered off slowly, and his eyes felt as though they held the same mixture of emotion as Richie's. "But I'm alright, buddy. It didn't happen. Everything's good now."

To punctuate his point, Eddie reached his hand out into the space between their two beds, a silent invitation.

Without even a moment of hesitation, Richie reached across and grasped onto Eddie's hand.

Within moments, they were asleep.

The next morning, Richie awoke to the sound of someone banging on the door.

He jolted upright, and without even being aware that his and Eddie's hands were still clasped in the empty space between the two beds, yanked his arm away.

As such, Richie yanked hard enough, while also grasping tightly to Eddie's hand, that he inadvertently and unintentionally pulled Eddie off from his bed entirely and onto the floor.

Eddie had awoken as he was being pulled roughly off from his bed. He sat up from where he had fallen onto the floor, rubbed his head that had casually hit the nightstand on his way down, and glared up

at Richie. He squinted against the harsh sunlight that was coming in from behind the curtain. "Jesus, fuck, Richie!"

There was banging at the door once more, and Richie catapulted himself off from the bed to answer it.

As soon as he stopped at the door, Richie pulled it open to reveal Bill, Mike, Ben, and Beverly, all dressed, packed, and ready to go.

Bill's jaw dropped slightly, seeing the frazzled man in his pajamas, "you're not ready, yet!"

Ben glanced around Richie and into the room and chuckled. He pulled Bev over so she could see and pointed at where Eddie still sat on the floor between the two beds, carefully rubbing his skull.

"Rough night, boys?" Bev teased.

"Oh, fuck off, Beverly," Eddie grumbled. "I just got man-handled onto the floor because of your impatient asses."

"Man-handled, ay?" Ben retorted while Bev made an 'ooooo' sound. Eddie curtly flipped them off and pushed himself off from the floor. Neither one of them offered any further explanation as to why Eddie was on the floor.

Richie rubbed his eyes, and glanced around the room to find a clock. "What time is it?"

"It's almost noon, Richie," Mike said. "Check out was literally an hour ago, and we went to breakfast without you guys."

At that, Eddie started coughing excessively from where he was pouring a glass of water from the sink. "What the fuck? It's fucking *noon?*"

Realizing it was going to be a little while before they were ready to leave, Bill, Ben, Bev, and Mike all pushed their way past Richie and sat on the little sofa in the room.

"Yeah, what kept you guys up so late last night?" Bev asked with a lilt to her voice, her insinuation obvious in her tone.

This time it was Richie's turn to flip her off, and he casually walked over to his small duffel in search of a pair of jeans and his tooth brush. "Shove it, Bev, I couldn't sleep."

"So you made Eddie not sleep, too, then?" Ben replied with a grin.

Hearing his name, Eddie turned toward the group and rolled his eyes. He leaned carefully against the little kitchenette counter. "Oh for fuck's sake, does anyone have a Tylenol? My head's killing me." His glare turned back to Richie. "Motherfucker, I can't believe to pulled me onto the floor."

Richie waved his hand dismissively. "Right-o, chap!" Richie belted out in his poor British accent. "You heard the man! Time to move! Tally-ho, and all that rot!" With that, Richie turned into the bathroom and slammed the door.

"Richie! That doesn't even make any sense!" Mike shouted.

Eddie simply pouted and rubbed once more at his aching head.

About an hour later, they were all standing in the parking lot.

"It's your turn to drive, Richie!"

"No, Eddie, they said it's *our* turn to drive!"

"And you can go first because my head still fucking hurts from hitting the nightstand!"

"It's not *my* fault you hit your head."

"*Really?*" Eddie all but growled. "How was that not your fucking fault, Richie!?"

The rest of their group stood watching with a building sense of trepidation. Admittedly, this was a typical experience with Eddie and Richie; they were always arguing-it was inevitable.

However, the four of them could only imagine how the next 12 hours of driving would go.

"Hey," Mike said, stepping forward to capture Richie and Eddie's attention. The two of them had been facing each other with Richie looking like he was about to keel over in laughter and Eddie looking like he was about to kill Richie. "I have an idea...Rock, paper, scissors."

It was a pacifying gesture that Mike prayed would work.

Eddie rolled his eyes, and balled his hand into a fist.

One round, two round, and Richie won, shouting a triumphant '*ha!*' while Eddie groaned out '*fuck you, Richie.*'

Their first real stop of the day was in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Everyone other than Eddie and Richie were already seeking refuge from their bickering only two hours into their drive, and Richie had demanded they pull off because he liked the name of the town.

"How can you like the name of a town, you fucking pinhead?" Eddie had mumbled, exiting the vehicle.

It was about 3:30 in the afternoon and they had all decided to have an early dinner so they could focus on driving for the next several hours. It had been a late start for their day, and Bill suggested they try to make it to West Virginia before stopping for the night.

"It's about a 7 hour drive from here to Morgantown, West Virginia. We could probably pull off there for the night," Beverly said as she glaced at her Google maps.

They still hadn't discussed where it was exactly they were driving to. At this point, they were just driving in whichever direction seemed right at the time.

"We'd get there about midnight," Ben figured. "Is that good with everyone else? Eddie, can you look up hotels after dinner while Richie drives?"

"Oy!" Richie piped up. "Who said it's my turn to drive now! He only drove for two hours, I have to drive for seven?"

"It's because they're hoping that you'll be too focused on driving to talk," Eddie laughed and reach over to shove Richie as they walked toward the restuarant they had stopped at.

And it was ironic, really. Because Eddie's mouth could be just as bad as Richie's when the two of them were together.

Bill and the others followed them close behind. "*No, Richie,*" Bill moaned, exasperated. "We're not expecting you to drive seven hours. We'll throw you two in the back after a couple hours. Maybe you guys can take a fuckin' nap."

It was good-natured and teasing, as always, and everyone was laughing. They all loved to give Eddie and Richie endless shit about their bickering.

As they entered the restaurant, they all watched as Eddie continued to shove Richie, which only resulted in Richie shoving him right back. They instigated each other on a daily basis; there was a demand for attention from each other that was tangible in the air between them. A need to close the space that existed there.

Everyone seemed to be aware of it. Except for the two of them, of course.

And, no, a casual conversation between the two would not suffice, thank you very much.

It was a sizzling, hot *need* to be touching.

Despite how much Richie and Eddie (mostly Eddie) acted bothered by the other-it really couldn't be farther from the truth. In any given scenario, if given a choice, Richie would pick Eddie and Eddie would pick Richie. Every time. Ten of out ten.

Beverly simply rolled her eyes as they walked to their seats. Eddie and Richie were the first to the large 8 person table that the waiter had seated them at.

And, of course, they sat next to each other.

After having checked into their hotel for the night and getting situated, Richie stated he needed to take a scalding hot shower.

And, no, Eddie hadn't counted on having to use the restroom during that time, but did it really matter?

The door to the bathroom was cracked open slightly and there was a cloud of steam surfacing from within, a testament to how hot the shower really was. As Eddie pushed the door open further, he caught a glance from beyond the other side of the curtain.

What he saw was a long, dark red abrasion going down the entire expanse of the other man's back.

The color of the wound was a stark contrast from the pale white skin of Richie's back. The abrasion was a deep, rich red and it looked so fucking angry, just barely scabbed over in few places, but open and sore in so many others.

It stretched from shoulder blade to shoulder blade and all the way down to the small of Richie's back, and Eddie couldn't stifle the small gasp that escaped his lips. *When the fuck had that happened?*

It looked so painful, and Eddie wondered absently to himself how Richie could possibly stand to take a shower so hot with a wound that severe. A shiver ran down Eddie's spine just thinking about it, and his hand raised to his own wounded cheek.

Without a word, Eddie retreated back into their room.

He could use the restroom later, he decided.

"What the fuck happened to your back, Richie?" Eddie said as soon as Richie walked out of the bathroom. He was already dressed in a long-sleeve cotton shirt and a pair of pajama pants. His damp hair was dripping down the back of his neck and already saturating the collar of his shirt.

Richie simply raised one eyebrow in a silent question as he walked across the room. "Checkin' me out while I was in the shower, ey, Eds?" he teased and he flopped down onto his own bed.

Eddie tried not to grimace, not because of Richie's words, but because he was once again picturing the extensive abrasion that covered Richie's back. The other seemed unaffected, however. "Doesn't that hurt? Like, really fucking bad?"

And, suddenly, Eddie remembered just how much he had pushed and picked at Richie all day. He wondered to himself if, at any point, he had inadvertently hurt the other man or made contact with the wound. A pang of guilt lodged itself in his throat as though it was something palpable.

"Not as bad as that time that your mom accidentally bent my dick while we were fuc-"

"*Beep-fucking-beep, Richie!*" Eddie cried, not ever wanting to hear the end of that sentence. He visibly shuddered and scowled at Richie. "Seriously, what happened?"

Richie simply shrugged and leaned himself back against the headboard of his bed. "Honestly, I don't completely remember. That whole fuckin' experience is a blur because I was freaking the fuck out so bad. I think it was after you ran to help Bill, I leaned again the rock and slid down." Richie shrugged again, looking thoughtful. "Must've happened then. Hurts like a sonovabitch though."

Eddie just watched him, thoughtful for a moment. Richie looked peaceful, almost small, as he leaned back against the headboard of his bed. His hair was still dripping water onto the back of his shirt and now his pillow, as well. His cheeks were rosy from his hot shower, and there were still traces of bruises all over his face and neck from several nights prior. He had a cut on the corner of his lip that was slowly beginning to heal.

Suddenly, Eddie wanted to go over to Richie. To place his thumb gently over the the cut on Richie's lip and ask him if it still hurt. He wanted to lift Richie's shirt and gently trace the large abrasion on his back, careful to do no harm. He wanted to take away any pain that existed there and replace it only with soft, gentle touches.

Eddie looked down and furrowed his brow at the thought, conflicted on what exactly it meant.

Eddie knew he was attracted to men; was more than willing to accept it at this point after so many years of repression (he hadn't just defeated a killer fucking clown to continue living a lie).

But what he was beginning to question was every interaction and moment he shared with Richie, not just now, but every moment he could conceivably recall.

He knew that he and Richie had a unique relationship-always had. That was just the way it was. But for how long had he subconsciously wondered what Richie's lips tasted like? Because he was certainly wondering that right this minute, and he wasn't dumb enough to assume that this was the first time that the thought had crossed his mind.

Repression was a hellova drug.

For a moment, he combed through a handful of interactions he and Richie shared, all the way from their childhood to right this second. He thought about how he always instinctively reached out to Richie, the gesture usually masked as one of vexation. Even something as simple as Richie throwing an arm around Eddie's shoulder spoke greater volumes than Eddie would have ever cared to admit in his past.

However, now, everything had changed.

Because four days ago, Eddie had almost died. And Richie had saved him.

And, quite frankly, Eddie was sufficiently tired of living the lie that he had apparently been living for the last 27 years of his life.

Eddie pulled himself from his thoughts and glanced over at Richie once more. At some point during Eddie's thoughtful self-revelation, Richie had fallen asleep.

He was still sitting upright against the headboard of his bed, but his head was hung forward with his hair in his face. His eyes were closed and his lips were only slightly parted, quiet snores escaping every few breaths. He looked peaceful which was, admittedly, very out of

place for one Richie 'Trashmouth' Tozier.

Eddie took the opportunity to watch him for a moment, a small smile settling across his face. This man, he thought to himself, meant the whole fucking world to him. That was nothing new, Eddie was sure of that much. Realizing that his feelings may extend a bit deeper than he had ever imagined was something he could tackle at a later time. For now, they would sleep.

And no matter what, he knew he would *always* have Richie.

With one last grin, Eddie grabbed one of the pillows beside him and chucked it at Richie's head.

The pillow bounced off Richie's head with enough force to immediately startle Richie awake and knock his glasses askew. His head shot up at once, his eyes looking frightened for a moment before settling on Eddie.

Eddie tucked himself down into his blankets and grinned as Richie pouted at him. "That's payback for pulling me off the bed this morning," he said, teasing, smiling.

And Richie simply smiled right back, big and bright, and eased his way down into his own blankets. "Yeah, yeah, yeah," he clucked. "Fuck you, Kaspbrak."

Eddie switched the lamp off, casting their room in darkness. "Ey, you wish, Tozier."

The last thing Eddie saw before closing his eyes was Richie's shit-eating grin.

Author's Note: Thoughts and opinions are appreciated! Let me know what you guys think!

